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Tributes to the Memory of -

John Pendleton Kennedy.

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TRIBUTES TO THE MEMORY OF HON. JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY.

1870

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TRIBUTES

TO THE MEMORY OF

HON. JOHN PENDLETON KENNEDY.

At a stated meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, on the 8th of September, 1870, after the transaction of the formal business, the President, the Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, spoke as follows: —

It is with no little personal sorrow that I announce the death of my cherished friend, the Honorable John Pendleton Kennedy, who was elected a Corresponding Member of this Society in 1858. I am sure the Society will indulge me, this morning, in dwelling at some length on the character and career of one, who had far higher claims than any friendship or affection of mine could give him to the regard and respect of his contemporaries.

Mr. Kennedy was born on the 25th of October, 1795, in the city of Baltimore; where his father, of Irish origin, who died early, was then a prosperous merchant. His mother, who lived to see her son — and he was her eldest — at the height of his reputation as an author and statesman, was a daughter of Philip Pendleton, of Berkeley County, Virginia, of a family distinguished by the virtues and accomplishments of more than one of its members. Graduated at Baltimore College in 1812, he soon selected the law as his profession. But our war with England was just then at its commencement; and

his pursuits were interrupted by the excitements of the period, and by the perils to which his native city was peculiarly exposed. With his friend, the late Mr. George Peabody, he volunteered and served as a private at the battles of Bladensburg and North Point; and with him, not many years ago, received from the United States the bounty land awarded to that service.

Admitted to the Baltimore Bar in 1816, he practised with success for several years, at a period when that Bar was adorned by such men as William Pinckney and William Wirt and the late Chief-Justice Taney; with more than one of whom he was sometimes associated as junior counsel in important causes, and with all of whom he was on terms of personal friendship. His taste for literary life, however, soon came in conflict with that for legal studies; and as early as 1818 he had become joint editor, with his accomplished friend, the late Peter Hoffman Cruse, of a little fortnightly serial, in prose and verse, under the title of "The Red Book." This little work was continued for two or three years, and its contents subsequently collected into two volumes.

And now the attractions of political service and public employment threatened to draw him away both from literature and from law. He was induced to take an active part in the Presidential campaign of 1820; and in the same year was elected a member of the House of Delegates of Maryland. In that body he rendered conspicuous service for several years; a part of the time as Speaker, and always as an intelligent and earnest advocate of measures for improving the financial condition and restoring the credit of the State.

In 1823, he accepted an appointment from President Monroe, as Secretary of our Legation to Chili; and I have heard him describe most humorously his first interview with the late John Quincy Adams, — then Secretary of State, of whom in later years he enjoyed the intimate acquaintance

and friendship, — when he called on Mr. Adams at the State Department for his instructions, preparatory to embarking for his post. "Instructions!" said Mr. Adams. "The only instructions I have to give you at present are these;" and reaching up, with the aid of a chair, to a high shelf, or pigeon-hole, in his bookcase, he handed him a carefully prepared description and drawing of the uniform which our Legations abroad were then required to wear, — not yet discarded as inconsistent with Republican principles, — and told him to provide himself accordingly. Mr. Kennedy's youthful aspirations for diplomacy were not stimulated, or altogether satisfied, by this view of what was expected of him; and, before it was too late, he obtained leave to resign the appointment.

His interest in public affairs, however, continued unabated; and, in the intervals of professional labor, he prepared and published a number of political essays, which attracted a wide and marked attention. Having warmly espoused the views of Henry Clay (of whom not long afterwards he became one of the most trusted and valued friends) on the subject of American Industry, he wrote and printed, in 1830, an elaborate and masterly reply to Mr. Cambreleng's memorable Report on Commerce and Navigation, which had a general circulation throughout the country; and in the following year he rendered eminent service, by tongue and pen, at a National Convention of the friends of Manufacturing Industry, held in the City of New York.

But it soon appeared that his more purely literary labors had by no means been abandoned or suspended, and that he was destined to make no common mark — for that period, certainly — in a line of literature in which our own honored Founder, Dr. Jeremy Belknap, had led the way in 1792, by his American tale, "The Foresters;" and in which Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper had since been so conspicuous.

In 1832, Mr. Kennedy published his first novel, under the

name of "Swallow Barn, or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion;" a work which produced a decided impression, and which received high commendations from the pen of Edward Everett, in the "North American Review," the only vehicle at that time of well-considered literary criticism in our part of the country. Its sketches of Virginia life and manners, including a very notable chapter on Slavery, entitled "The Quarter," furnish the best picture we have even now of that section of the Union at the period to which they relate, and possess not a little of historical interest and permanent value. This, too, may be said, even more emphatically, of his second novel, "Horse-Shoe Robinson, a Tale of the Tory Ascendency," published in 1835; of which the scene was laid in the Carolinas, during our Revolutionary struggle, and of which the hero was drawn from the life, — the incidents of his remarkable career having been derived from his own lips by Mr. Kennedy himself, while he was residing at the South for the benefit of his health, in 1819.

A third novel, "Rob of the Bowl; a Legend of St. Inigoes," in which there is much historical matter connected with the religious commotions in Maryland, in the time of the second Lord Baltimore, was published by him in 1838; and in 1840 he produced, in a fourth volume, under the title of "The Annals of Quodlibet," a humorous and satirical account of the Presidential campaign in which he was at that moment a prominent actor, with an almost dramatic presentment, under fictitious names, of scenes which had actually occurred within the range of his own observation and experience.

Mr. Kennedy had now, however, become a member of Congress, having been chosen as one of the Representatives of the Baltimore District in 1838, and having been re-elected in 1841 and 1843. His services at Washington were of the highest value and importance; and particularly those which he rendered as Chairman of the Committee on Commerce in the Twenty-seventh Congress. Having been associated with him

as his second on that Committee, as well as in the intimacies of a common table and of apartments under a common roof, I can bear personal testimony to the diligence and ability which he brought to the public business. His Reports on subjects connected with our Commercial System, and particularly on our proposed Reciprocity Treaties, were elaborate and exhaustive; and his speeches were forcible and eloquent. I cannot forget that we were together, too, on that Committee, when, not without hesitation and distrust, the first appropriation was reported to enable Mr. Morse to try the experiment, between Washington and Baltimore, of that Magnetic Telegraph, which now covers our continent, and encircles the earth. Though the Report was written and presented by another hand, it owed much of its success, both in Committee and in the House, to the earnest support of Mr. Kennedy.

In 1844, he published a very striking little volume, called "A Defence of the Whigs," which became almost a hand-book of politicians, and which contains an admirable vindication of the party with which he was always connected as long as it existed. But that party had but a precarious and fitful supremacy in Baltimore; and at the next election, in 1845, he failed of a majority, and was never again returned to Congress. The following year, however, found him again in the Chair of the House of Delegates at Annapolis, having been elected once more to the Legislature of Maryland, after an interval of five and twenty years, with a view to an important juncture in the affairs of his native State.

This service rendered, Mr. Kennedy once more quietly resumed his literary labors; and, as the result of them, published, in 1849, an excellent biography, in two octavo volumes, of the eminent lawyer and statesman, William Wirt, — one of the purest and best of the public men of his day, upon whom Mr. Kennedy had delivered a Eulogy, immediately after his death, in 1834. This work — in which the author sedu-

lously avoided all personal display, and allowed Mr. Wirt to exhibit himself to the best advantage in his own brilliant public addresses and lively familiar correspondence — was recognized everywhere as a valuable contribution to American Biography, and to the history of the times; and no better book of its kind could have been placed in the hands of the young men of the United States, to whom it was dedicated.

Meantime and previously, Mr. Kennedy had delivered not a few occasional Discourses, mostly of an historical character: one, in 1835, before the American Institute of New York; another, in the same year, before the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the University of Maryland, in which he had been appointed Professor of History, and of which he was the Provost for many years before his death; and a third, in 1845, before the Maryland Historical Society, of which he was Vice-President, on the Life and Character of George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, which involved him in a sharp controversy with several of the Roman Catholics of Maryland, to whom he made an elaborate rejoinder, exhibiting great ability and research. His Address, too, before the Maryland Institute, in 1851, published with engraved illustrations of the old town of Baltimore, as it was just a hundred years before, was replete with valuable local descriptions and details.

In 1852, on the resignation of Governor Graham of North Carolina, who had been appointed Secretary of the Navy by President Fillmore, on his succession to the Presidency after the lamented death of General Taylor, Mr. Kennedy was called to preside over the Navy Department of the United States; and continued a member of the Cabinet, of which his friends Mr. Webster and Mr. Everett were successively the chiefs, until the change of Administration, in March, 1853. This was the period of some of our most interesting Naval Scientific Expeditions: that of Commodore Perry to Japan; and that of Dr. Kane to the Arctic Ocean, in search of Sir John Franklin, for which Mr. Kennedy prepared the instructions,

and gave to it the most effective encouragement. His name was accordingly given by Dr. Kane to one of the channels which he discovered, and was inscribed on his map of the Arctic Regions.

The visit of Mr. George Peabody to his native land in 1856, and his noble endowment of the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, where, as a young banker, he had for some years resided, afforded Mr. Kennedy a new subject of interest, and opened to him a new field of useful labor. He was at once selected by Mr. Peabody, as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for his great gift to the Baltimore Institute; and I have the best authority for knowing how earnestly he entered upon and pursued the work of organization committed to him, and how highly and gratefully his services were appreciated by Mr. Peabody to the last.

The darkest days of our country were now rapidly approaching. Mr. Kennedy was never, I believe, an owner of slaves, nor ever a supporter or apologist for slavery. But, on the other hand, he had never co-operated or sympathized with the extreme Abolitionists of the North, and had always united in measures for securing to his own, and the other Southern States, the rights in regard to this institution which were expressed or implied in the Constitution of the United States, as he understood its provisions. No northern man, however, could have been more averse than he was to the extension of slavery into new territories. He was, moreover, a devoted lover of the Union, and held in abhorrence all ideas either of peaceable or forcible secession or nullification. Living in a Border State, where the personal and party feuds which preceded and followed the outbreak of the Rebellion were so violent and bitter, and upon which at one time it seemed as if the whole brunt of the battle might fall, his first hopes undoubtedly were, as were those of many of his friends farther North, that some arrangement or adjustment might be devised, with a view to prevent the fratricidal strife, and avert the full horrors of

Civil War. He was in complete accord with the great Boston Memorial to that effect, which, under the lead of Mr. Everett, and in company with others of all parties, I had a share in the privilege of bearing to Congress in January, 1861. In this spirit, he published, a few weeks before the first fatal blow had been struck, a pamphlet entitled "The Border States; their Power and Duty," which presented the great questions before the country with boldness and signal ability, and appealed to the Border States to interpose, by some separate concerted action, for the settlement of all issues in dispute, and for the ultimate preservation of the Union. Reviewed in the light of subsequent developments and of final results, this appeal would probably be regarded with less approbation than it was at the time of its publication. But even then, as it soon proved, the time for discussion had passed, and little remained but to resist force by force. In that contest, Mr. Kennedy's influence and efforts were strongly and unqualifiedly on the side of the Government and the Union, and no coldness of friends, or dangers from enemies, could deter or daunt him.

During the progress of the War, he communicated a series of Letters to the "National Intelligencer," under the assumed name of "Paul Ambrose," in which he ably discussed "the principles and incidents of the Rebellion as these rose to view in the rapid transit of events;" which were collected and published in a volume, with his own name, in 1865. This was the last work which he gave to the public; and he soon afterwards embarked for Europe, in the hope of reinvigorating his somewhat shattered health.

It was not his first visit abroad. He had crossed the Atlantic twice before, and was no stranger to some of the best of English and European society. In those visits, he had renewed the intimacy with Thackeray and Dickens which he had enjoyed while they were in America, and had formed many other friendships with the literary men of France and England.

During his last tour, he was selected by Mr. Seward as one of the United-States Commissioners, at the grand Exposition of the Industry of all Nations in Paris, and in that capacity rendered valuable services; especially as one of the small select Commission, under the Presidency of Prince Napoleon, to which the subject of a uniform Decimal Currency was referred.

Mr. Kennedy had more than once contemplated giving to the press his "Notes of Travel," of which he has left many manuscript volumes, carefully composed and revised, which may still, I trust, furnish the material of a posthumous publication.

On his last return home, in October, 1868, he presided at a great Republican Mass Meeting in Baltimore; and made an earnest and eloquent appeal to the South to acquiesce cordially in the results of the War, and to unite "in that new pathway which Providence has ordained to be the line of our future march to the highest destiny of nations." This was his last public word.

In looking back on the life which has been thus rapidly sketched, and comparing his capacities for usefulness with his actual career, one cannot but feel how much has been lost to the best service of the country, in his case as in too many others, by the accidents of politics, and the caprices of parties. As a Senator, or as a Diplomatist, he would have done eminent honor to the nation at home or abroad; and he seemed particularly suited, by his abilities, his accomplishments, and his tastes, for prolonged and continuous service in spheres like these. But it was not in his nature to seek them, and it was not his fortune to enjoy them. I may be pardoned for recalling, in such a connection, those striking lines of Coleridge: —

> "How seldom, Friend! a good great man inherits
> Honor or wealth, with all his worth and pains!
> It sounds like stories from the world of spirits

If any man obtain that which he merits,
Or any merit that which he obtains.
. . . . . .
Goodness and greatness are not means, but ends!
Hath he not always treasures, always friends,
The good great man? — three treasures, love, and light,
And calm thoughts, regular as infant's breath;
And three firm friends, more sure than day and night, —
Himself, his Maker, and the angel Death."

Mr. Kennedy, as a man, was greater and better than all his books. One certainly looks in vain in all that he wrote or did for the full measure of those gifts and acquirements of mind and heart, that learning and wisdom, that wit and humor, that whole-souled cordiality and gayety and kindness, which shone out so conspicuously in the intimacies of daily intercourse. A truer friend or more charming companion has rarely been found or lost by those who have enjoyed the privilege of his companionship and friendship; and among those may be counted not a few of our most distinguished authors and statesmen. A delightful week which I passed under his roof, many years ago, gave me an opportunity of witnessing the esteem and affection in which he was held by my only fellow-guest, Washington Irving, — whose Life, indeed, contains more than one letter to him, beginning, "Dear Horse Shoe," and ending "Geoffrey Crayon."

Though far advanced in his seventy-fifth year, and though he had occasionally suffered not a little of late from severe physical infirmities, Mr. Kennedy was naturally of so genial and joyous a temper, and sympathized so warmly with the young and gay, that the idea of his being an old man had hardly yet occurred to any one but himself. In the eyes of those around him, he seemed to have nothing of age except its experience and its mellowness. He was not insensible himself, however, to the approach of the inexorable hour. In a letter which I received from him not many weeks ago, — one of the last of a series running through a term of more than thirty years, — he said to me with more of sadness than I had ever known

him to write, certainly in regard to himself: "It is but small consolation to me — when I look at my letter-file, and see three or four of your letters asking for a word of recognition, — to argue my good intentions, and my infirmity of hand, for that silence which I daily resolve to break; for it is so persistently followed by a new delinquency, in the breach of my resolve, as to bring me nothing better than a new regret. But I know you will pardon these habitual shortcomings,— like the good and trusty friend you have always been, — and indulge me in that constrained silence, which is, in truth, only the sign and warning of one more inevitable, that comes with gentle step and, I trust, a friendly message to make it welcome."

A few weeks more at Saratoga Springs, by the advice of his physician, and a few weeks afterwards at Newport, where he had fixed his summer residence for several years past, completed his earthly career. A hidden malady was developed, which, after two days of agony, patiently and bravely borne, and one day of tranquil slumbers, released him to his rest. I may not omit to add that, in a blessed interval of wakefulness and ease, he eagerly renewed those pledges of Christian faith which he had often given in health, and was able to take leave of those dearest to him, as he said, "in perfect peace of mind and body."

He died at Newport, on the 18th of August; and his remains were at once removed to his native city, to repose in the neighboring Green Mount Cemetery, at the dedication of which he had delivered the Address, in 1839.

Mr. Kennedy left no children. His wife, who, with her sister, has rendered his home for more than thirty years so dear and delightful to himself, and so attractive to his friends, is a daughter of the late Edward Gray, Esq., of Baltimore, one of the worthiest and most respected merchants of that city; of whom Irving, on hearing of his death in 1856, wrote thus, in words which I can indorse with all my heart: "To be under

his roof, in Baltimore, or at Ellicott's Mills, was to be in a constant state of quiet enjoyment to me. Every thing that I saw in him, and in those about him; in his tastes, habits, mode of life; in his domestic relations and chosen intimacies, — continually struck upon some happy chord in my own bosom, and put me in tune with the world and with human nature."

Mr. Kennedy received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws from Harvard University in 1863; and has been, for some years, an Associate Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Professor James Russell Lowell then said: —

Mr. President, — In the few words I shall say of Mr. Kennedy, I shall speak of him as it is fitting to speak of a man who made affection easy, and whom a short acquaintance had invested with something of the tender privilege of long friendship. Death should give a shelter from vague eulogy no less than from impertinent criticism. Here is no place for those *invidiosi veri*, on which, one is sometimes tempted to think, the Anglo-Saxon conscience is apt to lay an undue emphasis.

It is very likely that Mr. Kennedy could not be called a man of genius in the creative sense of that somewhat elastic word; but it is surely something to his honor, that, amid the manifold distractions of a busy and public life, he should have cherished the sweet and pure ambition of letters, of a higher and more durable success than politics and popularity can offer. In a society so prosperously active as ours, it is of good example to have had an intellectual ideal, and perhaps it is fairer here than elsewhere to measure a man rather by his aims than by his performance. After all, unless we adopt the plan of Pepys, and allow shelf-room only to books of blue blood, we must be willing to find a place for many volumes that could not make their claims valid with the heralds of literature. An exclusive commerce with the great may make us unduly

fastidious, and it is wholesome to unbend our faculties now and then from the strain of that Alpine society in the company of authors who simply know how to be agreeable. I think Mr. Kennedy's books have this pleasant quality, — a secret not seldom missed by writers more pretentious and of greater power. They are refined, manly, considerate of our grosser apprehensions; they attempt no solution of the problem of the Infinite (as it is called); they abound in cheerful pictures of natural scenery; and they will have a real value for the historian, from their lively notices of manners already remote. Perhaps the strongest impression they leave upon the mind is that they were written by a gentleman, a profession of greater consequence than is generally conceived.

Perhaps we overestimate the worth of mere literary ability. The lion has been the painter this time, and authors have not been slack in impressing on mankind the supreme importance of their function. Nevertheless it may well be suspected that the power of expressing fine sentiments is of a lower quality than the less obtrusive skill of realizing them in the life and character. This talent Mr. Kennedy possessed beyond most men. One could not be in his company for never so short a time, without being touched by that gentle consideration for others which is the root of all good breeding. His courtesy was not the formal discipline of elegant manners. There was a sense of benefaction in it. Whoever came near him felt the friendly charm which his nature radiated, so that his very house seemed steeped in it and welcomed you no less heartily than he. He was in the highest sense a genial man. He had a singular gift for companionship, for being something better than his books, and his finer qualities were lured out by the sympathy of the fireside. He was excellent in anecdote and reminiscence. His talk had just that pleasant suspicion of scholarship in it that befits the drawing-room, and never degenerated to the coarser flavor of pedantry. He could quote his bit of Horace or Virgil on occasion, which used to

be the neck-verse of cultivated men. He had the somewhat rare excellence of being playfully earnest; and, though he had strong convictions, never made them the scourge of other men.

But though gentleness was a prime quality in this gracious temperament, he could, when the times demanded, show qualities of stouter fibre. During the war of the Rebellion he stood firmly by the Nation, though it cost him a social position, which, to a man of his affectionate nature and social instincts, was dearer than any thing but duty. In the North it was easy to be loyal, — it was sometimes even profitable; but in Maryland loyalty meant ostracism, and might mean something worse. For Mr. Kennedy it sundered lifelong ties of friendship, and habitudes of society scarce less painful in the breaking. He might have escaped it all by a judicious impartiality between right and wrong; nay, even by a little of that caution which we call meanness if it fail, and prudence if it prosper. But he was a brave man, and chose the nobler privilege of danger.

How much fame may fall to his share, it would be out of place to compute too closely. Suffice it that he at least escaped its vulgar makeweight, notoriety. Surely he has something better, as it is sweeter, in gentle memories that will perish only with the last of those who knew him.

The Hon. George S. Hillard next addressed the meeting:

I should not have added any thing to what has been said in honor of Mr. Kennedy, were it not that I am one of the few now present that were personally acquainted with him. This acquaintance was not of long duration, nor was it intimate; indeed, my personal knowledge of him hardly began before he was sixty; but I knew him well enough to feel able to give my emphatic assent to all that has been said in commendation of him by Professor Lowell and yourself.

No one could see and know Mr. Kennedy without feeling

that he himself was more and better than his writings, excellent and estimable as these are. He was a man whose elements of growth were self-derived. He was born in a Southern state, and had the best training which that portion of the country could furnish at the time of his youth. The natural drift of men so born and taught was to politics; but he resisted this general proclivity. He gave himself to literature and law, and slid into politics incidentally and accidentally; and as literature was his first, it remained to the last his strongest love.

Mr. Kennedy was delightful in all the social relations. He was given to hospitality, and no man appeared to more advantage when dispensing the gifts of hospitality. His conversation was frank, easy, and hearty. Men in our country, who have been much in public life, are apt to fall into a cautious and non-committal style of discourse. They are prone to talk with a vigilant self-observation, as if they feared that their words might be reported to their disadvantage by some unfriendly hearer. But he had none of this cold and timid prudence. He spoke out that which was in him, not fearing sometimes to utter what an ever cautious temper would have left unspoken. His conversation had the freshness, the freedom, the courage of youth. His mind, his heart, never grew old.

Of his works of fiction my recollection is but indistinct; but I freshly remember his "Life of Wirt," and I think it one of the most graceful, genial, and delightful pieces of biography that the literature of our country has to show. And let me here express the hope that some competent hand will do for him what he did so well for his friend; and the correspondence and unpublished manuscripts of Kennedy will surely afford to the biographer a theme not less full and fruitful than that furnished by the life and labors of the eminent lawyer, and more than respectable man of letters, whom he so well commemorated.

The President then read the following letter from Professor Oliver Wendell Holmes : —

164 Charles Street, Sept. 8th, 11 A.M.

My dear Mr. Winthrop :

I am much disappointed in finding myself still so far indisposed that I do not feel like going to the meeting to-day.

The circumstance that I was probably the last member of our Society who met Mr. Kennedy made me anxious to have an opportunity to add a few words to the tribute you will pay to his memory, which I feel sure will be all that affectionate esteem and the knowledge of a life-time can render it. I could really have contributed nothing, except the memory of my few interviews, the two last of which, within less than a week of Mr. Kennedy's death, were singularly delightful. He was full of talk, so cheerful, so genial, so varied, — sometimes on political and historical matters with which he was familiar, sometimes relating personal experiences of which he had such a fund in his memory, always lively, entertaining, graceful in his discourse, — that I have rarely sat in a company when one man did more to keep all the rest happy in listening to him. There was no look of warning, no tone that could suggest a melancholy foreboding; but, bright and brave in the face of fast gaining infirmity which he would not betray to sadden others, he shed sunshine about him to the last.

It is singular that, having met him so few times, I should feel as if I knew him so well, and regret his loss so deeply. It was not merely because he was of a true and generous nature, and of a fine intelligence and culture, but because he was so frank and hearty with those whom he honored with his friendship, that a week with him was like a year with a man of a narrower mould and colder feelings.

I have written at a moment's notice, as I did hope to be with you; but if you can make any use of my note, pray do so.

Believe me, dear Mr. Winthrop,

Yours faithfully,

O. W. Holmes.

The meeting was then dissolved.

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